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## SOME OBSERVATIONS ON PRISONS IN VLADIVOSTOCK AND SAKHALIN.

AN ADDRESS BY

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MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN :

I feel very grateful, naturally, for the very kind remarks by which I have been introduced to you. Allow me to say that coming from one whose apt eloquence on international occasions has won for him the admiration, the respect and the attention of geographers throughout Europe, and who has also commanded for every member of the American Geographical Society a certainty of cordial welcome on all international occasions, I am very grateful.

I see, by the card, that I am expected to deliver a *lecture* on the subject in question. To lessen your forthcoming disappointment I ask you to expect only a little talk from an old neighbor and friend, who, although he has visited Russia four times up to this moment, has never even sent a letter to a newspaper on this topic. So you will understand that this is purely a confidential talk to old friends and neighbors.

It is an extremely difficult thing for the people of any one country to form a fair judgment or estimate of other countries, and especially of the penal system of any country; that penal system having been evolved out of conditions of which you yourselves have no experience. Consequently, I have taken very great pains in my studies of penal questions first of all, as quickly as I could, to understand the people. In this way I have found what I think you will find, if you choose to prove it, that if you want to understand the genius of a people the place where you will learn it is rather in the prisons than in the palaces.

I will ask your attention to one preliminary remark.

In connection with what I have just now said about our forming a fair estimate of the penal system of another country, I would suggest that you try to remind yourselves of the nature of Russian civilization. It is most difficult, when we think for a moment of the present position of Russia among the nations, to imagine that only eight or nine centuries ago the Emperor of Russia was a heathen, notorious for his human sacrifices to his heathen gods. It is difficult for us to imagine that less than two hundred years ago

the very ground on which the Russian capital now stands did not belong to Russia.

Although we find most wonderful culture, intelligence and learning in Russia, and everybody who has met Russians has remarked their courtesy, their finish and their remarkably correct pronunciation of any language, still it is only fair to say that those individuals are much like the silver and gold that we find in silver and gold mines: it runs only in streaks and in pockets. For the rest of the people we will not say much.

One of the greatest difficulties in the way of progress in the Russian Empire was the nomadic habits of the people. As you know, they were mostly Tartars; those who were not Tartars were Goths. And during the early part of its history the entire area of Russia was so overrun by Tartar tribes that, like the waves of the sea tossing to and fro, army was marching against army, tribe against tribe, with inevitable bloodshed, and such famine as has never been heard of in history, out of China.

The first time there was any cessation of this bloody strife was when Ivan the Terrible managed to meet these Tartars with firearms. That gave them a shock from which they recoiled, and fled toward Siberia. The next step in the progress of Russia was when Boris Godunoff introduced by an edict the institution of serfdom on the 25th day of November, 1597. He issued an edict that every peasant should thereafter belong to the soil on which he was found on that date. Much as it may go against our general feeling to consider this idea of serfdom, undoubtedly it was one of the most important steps in the commencement of real progress in Russia.

Now, about this time Yermak discovered Siberia, and the great question became, "How to populate Siberia?", because that immense area was only a geographical expression. "How shall we colonize that country?" Emigrants could not be sent from Russia, the men being bound to the soil. They were serfs. That edict did not cross the Urals. There has never been a serf in all Siberia. From whence, then, should this population come? This problem confronted Peter the Great and he began to send his prisoners of war there, Swedish, Norwegian and others at first, and afterwards criminals were sent. One of the problems before the Government, and a great objective point to be attained, has been the productive, solid colonization of Siberia. Remembering this, it may be supposed that when a magistrate sends a man to Siberia he feels that he has done something for his country, knowing, as he does, that the very best land in the Russian Empire is that of the middle regions of Siberia. The exiles, none the less, try to escape.

Between 1871 and 1876, for example, from one province alone, over five thousand exiles escaped, or attempted to escape. It costs a good deal to send an exile to Siberia, and if you have then to hunt him up and put him back, it is a very costly matter, and there are, besides, the immense army and the posts needed on the border. The remedy that seemed to suggest itself for this great expense was to have some great out-of-door prison from which nobody could escape, and the Russians thought of Sakhalin, the island of which I am going to speak to you.

Although the old Tartar nomadic feeling is strong among the Russian masses, still they have a superstitious dread of distances. If you should go among a crowd at the piers of St. Petersburg you would not ask in reference to a stranger, "How much has he got?" but "How far?" Tell me how many versts a man has been condemned to, and I will tell you his crime; at least I will tell you the verdict. If it is a mild crime, it may be simply to Tomsk, for a year, or two or three years. If it is a worse crime it may be two or three thousand miles further. If more, still further. So it is continually going beyond, and beyond, and beyond. The part I will show is where we come to what may be called getting behind the *beyond*.

It is very common among my friends, to ask of me, "Now tell me, is it really all true, those horrible things that are told us about Siberia?" Well, now you see if I were to attempt to answer that, it would take me a hundred years to find out all about those horrible things, and I can't say "No" or "Yes," because it would take me just as long a time to become competent. The most I can say is "That it is possible." But I am quite at liberty, and that is what I am going to do to-night, to tell you some things I know. Not because I wish you to accept my view—I have no view—but because in this way I contribute a personal part; just as if you want a truthful picture of any one man it is better for you to have a great many, forming a composite picture, and as you gather experiences in that way, of a great number of people, without the trouble of going yourself, you may arrive at some tolerably fair conclusion. But you must not be surprised if nearly everybody gets a different impression wherever he goes, from that which he sees; the very best results to most of us in foreign travel anywhere are really subjective just as much as objective.

My attention had been called to Sakhalin and I was anxious to know whether there were any political exiles there; call them "reformers" if you like.

I saw an official letter, No. 2926, and it gave a long list of political exiles; and the letter stated that no distinction must be made between them and other convicts. That is precisely the most difficult and painful part of the political exile question. There is such an immense difference between the lower orders of Russia and any man of education, that that is frequently one of the most painful parts of the situation of the exiles. Instances were reported in a newspaper of merciless beatings and cannibalism, and I read the name of a certain official who would first starve and then shoot the convicts, and state that the deaths were through disease.

I thought that somebody ought to know about this place, and though it was said to be impossible to get there, I thought I would try it. Most writers on Siberia have stopped short of the Pacific. Kennan got as far as Irkutsk, and there turned back. Lansdell got as far as Yakutsk; he tried to go as far as he could.

Further east is Vladivostock, the terminus of the Trans-Siberian railroad; and beyond this lies Sakhalin, the place of which I speak. When it was first instituted the people sent there were murderers, double murderers, heads of gangs of assassins, and political culprits who were held to be of equal criminality. I had the good fortune to get there at a time when the population was simply at its worst. This island, you see, is about from 45 to 54 degrees north latitude, and is bisected by about the 142d degree of east longitude.

When I arrived at Vladivostock I at once called upon the Prefect, handed my card, showed my passport, etc., and the same evening, while I was at dinner, he was kind enough to come and join me. Well, he was amiable; I tried to make him so. He said he was very much astonished; he could not understand it. Whatever could I be doing; why should I come out all this distance?, etc. I gave a great many explanations, and he thought I must be an extremely rich man, and all that sort of thing, and then he said, as he was going away, "What can I do for you?" "Well," I said, "that's very kind of you. You can't do much for me." "Well," he said, "what would you like?" "Well," I said, "you see what I am after; I am trying to go and explore the Island of Yezo." (This is the most northern island of Japan.) "It seems to me that the only way, according to the map, is to strike Sakhalin, and then cross the strait of La Perouse, and land off Cape Soya; then on that very volcanic island, which so far as I know has not been traversed, I intend to travel from the north to Hakodate. If you can help me to Sakhalin——" "Oh, no. The fact is that it is a name; you know that there is a certain place which we don't mention very often, ex-

cept when we are very angry perhaps, and Sakhalin is just such a place. I have heard a convict say to another, who had been sent to Sakhalin, that he had gone to the Isle of the Damned."

He said, "Would you care to see the prison?" "Oh, I have no objection; yes, if you like." I never exhibited any special desire to see what I was there for. So at last I consented to go to the prison. It was like most of those prisons—a huge stockade, with a great, heavy log gate, on entering which you are surrounded on all sides by the big outer court, with *cameras* (sheds), you would call them barracks. Not much of the prison idea, such as we understand by "prison." In there and in the various cameras were two or three hundred men standing about. They were smoking, those who wanted to, and talking; if they wanted anything to eat which was not furnished by the authorities, anybody was allowed to give it to them from the outside, handing it through the gate. The most troublesome part, the worst part, is the absence of occupation.

The fact is that the larger number there were under arrest and had been awaiting trial, and that is one of the sad features in these prisons,—the long time before a man can get a trial. It all grows out of the passport question. Nearly everybody who was there was one who had some other man's passport, or who had none.

The Prefect said: "Now go, wherever you like; no hesitation. I will stand away; go off somewhere, talk to anybody, say what you like."

I went through the various cameras and then among the men. My friend said: "I'll tell you one thing in advance. You will find that the men have not done anything wrong, and they would like to know what they were there for." Well, I found that that statement was true. Then he said: "I will point out some men who talk French and German; perhaps that will be easier for you." He did so. I was talking to one man in French, and he told me a most sad story.

He had escaped, and was fifteen months going through the forests. At last he reached Vladivostock, and succeeded in what they like better than all. He succeeded in getting on an American ship, and he thought he was safe. He packed himself in amongst the cargo. The vessel was to sail in about three hours, and when three miles away of course he would have been free forever.

Suddenly he felt a tug at his right boot. He had not had the slightest idea of it, but his right foot was sticking out, and the man who was tugging at it was a policeman, making his final search of the ship before it sailed.

I went after that to the first village. It is up the road and around the hills about three miles. That is a village entirely for exiles, and as I like always on such occasions to go quite alone and drop in unexpectedly, I visited most of the cottages.

In Vladivostock I talked of nothing but the exploration of Yezo, and it got about in the Marine Club that I was some sort of a wonderful explorer. I could not help that. I did not call myself an explorer, but as an explorer they gave me a dinner at the Club, and there sitting nearly opposite me was a magnificent looking officer in full regimentals. I told him what I wished to do. He said: "But do you think you dare try?" I said, "I don't know; I have crossed the English Channel in an open rowboat, and I think I can visit La Perouse Strait."

He said nobody was allowed to go to Sakhalin. In the first place, there is no means of getting there, and then nobody would be allowed to land if he did get there, because the sentinels would stop him, and he must have a special passport from the Governor, and then if I did get ashore there is no such thing as a tavern or a bed or a store on the entire island. "What would you do?" I said, "I don't know what I would do, except that I had always found the Russians a very hospitable people," etc. Well, the dinner went on and he became wonderfully amiable, and insisted, as he had only finished his holiday (he had been away for a month), and was going back to-morrow or the next day, that I must go with him and stay with him all summer—as long as I liked. "To tell the truth, we are as badly off as the exiles themselves," said he. "There is very little difference between us, and if you will only come it will be a benefaction to us all. We shall all thank you for it."

If I had hesitated a moment the door would have been completely shut against me. The best things that come to the traveller are the unexpected, and if you wish to be successful as a traveller you must seize any opportunity which happens to turn up.

With true Russian punctuality, instead of starting to-morrow morning, he started the day after to-morrow morning.

It took us about three days and a half to reach Sakhalin. When we arrived I had a very beautiful experience. Just as we were approaching these straits, at dawn, I noticed an island which looked like a monument. It is about ten miles around, and from every side, in curves of the most beautiful description, it rises from the extreme base to the apex, not like a pyramid, but with a beautiful sweep of curves, six thousand feet. Under the morning

mists and then with the disappearance of the mists, and in the different atmospheres through the day, it was surprising how beautiful were the effects, and as sunset approached the mists around were deepening and the colors becoming more and more rosy and then gorgeously red. Just as the sun was going down the full moon came up. One side of this mountain was suffused with the rosy blush of the sunset, the other side colored with the white light of the moon, and as the sun went down and the moon rose up and up, the lights crossed and the flush cooled and then faded away until it seemed like a human blush, and then down and down, whiter and whiter as the moon rose, it came to be as white as snow.

My first revelation of the peculiarities of Sakhalin occurred the day after this. I was on deck and I said to the first mate, "What a remarkably good boatswain that is you have got. He seems to look so well after the men." He said, "Come here." I went with him to the other side of the deck. "Now," said he, "you must not tell anybody about this secret, but that man is a murderer; they are all murderers, but," he said, "a better man I don't wish to have. The other men know what sort of a man he is, and I assure you they know how to keep their places, and I have no trouble with any of them."

The Government boat was manned in that way, and then I saw the reason for what I had hardly noticed before, that the gangways were all guarded by sentinels.

Well, we arrived after three days and a half at Korsakoff.

The one thing that strikes you as you get further and further north in those regions is the silence and the absence of life. Here is a large bay, but it has not a sign of life. Here are buildings running up the hill to the top.

We landed, and just here the officers were awaiting us. The Governor invited several friends to come up to dinner. We had just had dinner on the boat, but that does not matter in Russia.

During the general talk among the officers, I noticed that there was a considerable sensation, and asked what had happened. "Well, only five of the worst men escaped last night, and it is impossible to know what road to travel, or what may happen."

The Governor's house was all of wooden logs, very thick—a house like a fort. A room, very large and comfortable, was the Governor's bureau, private room, etc., and was assigned to me. In one corner was a very suggestive thing, a table piled up with letters, loving messages from different parts of Russia, never delivered, and messages also from here which had never been delivered. These



letters were being inspected, and nobody could tell which would be delivered and which not.

Well, these five men had escaped, and it was said their favorite revenge was fire, and that it was impossible to know what would happen.

When the Governor said "Good night," he brought pistols and laid them close beside me, and then a walking stick, made to look like an old-fashioned battle-axe, such as Ivan the Terrible had, and he set that down. "Now," he said, "it's all right." I did not say a word. He did not know that I knew of the escape, but he said "Don't hesitate. *Au revoir*," and went away.

I felt rather uncomfortable when he said that on no occasion was I to open one of the heavy barred windows. I said I would not. After awhile, I suppose about two o'clock in the morning, I heard *clank, clank*, outside. I must say I was very, very anxious indeed, but nothing happened and the next morning I was told that it was probably the guard. At day-break—you could hardly see day-break on account of the shutters—one of the ugliest looking women I ever saw crept in with a cup of tea that is always given in Asia very early in the morning;—and she was a *murderess*. I went to the little tent outside to have breakfast, and a man came up behind me and reached over my shoulder, and he was a murderer. Then when we rode out after breakfast, a man, with magnificent broad shoulders and splendid face, drove, and he was a murderer. The fact is, strange as it may seem, they have no choice; all the domestics must come from the material they have, and if you take a thief, he is almost always sure to stay a thief, while a murderer may be a very nice kind of a person. They did that kind of thing among themselves and I don't want any better men than some of those that were sent there for murder.

The Governor said, "Now then, I'll tell you what I propose to do. You see I am just back. Everything is out of order. Now it will take me a long time to catch up; I have got to inspect everything. We have got forty-four horses in the stable, a steam pinnace, launch boat, and we will have to inspect everything, and I want you to go with me if you have no objection." That was just what I wanted.

Well, it is a peculiar thing to be in a country under such circumstances. The silence, everywhere we went, for example, was a striking thing. There was not a bird except a throstle, and that had no song; there was not a flower that had any fragrance; there was not a fruit that had any sweetness.

The fish at Sakhalin were very remarkable. It may seem strange but it is true, that standing at the dock, it seems impossible to drop a stone without killing a large number, or dip a net without pulling it up full.

The prisoners serve two years in prison. The first question asked is, "What can you do?" and then the prisoner is put at anything he is best capable of doing—lodging in the prison.

If he is capable of work in the prison, it may be carpentry, etc.

At the end of his two years, or perhaps less, he is told he can go out and still work in the prison or otherwise, but he is helped until he can maintain himself.

If he is a farmer, and understands agriculture at all, he is sent out to one of the thirteen agricultural villages. He is given a new modern cottage, or an old one, and he is allowed a certain amount of money. He has an ox, and if he requires it, a horse, a team and all sorts of seed and rations to subsist on, until he can get his crop.

The essential idea is to direct the men into self-maintenance just as soon as possible.

The prison stands opposite the Governor's house.

You find a number of large yards, and these barracks or modern houses around each yard.

In all that large prison there were only three cells, all large rooms. The Russians are a gregarious people, flocking together. They do practically what they like in prison—they smoke and go out in gangs to work. The three cells I saw were occupied by the most distinguished prisoners, and it is considered a sort of a special favor to occupy them. Two of them were occupied by princes, and were fitted up about as well as the quarters of an ordinary captain.

I made my observatory of the hospital, because, as I have said before, in a prison you can study the genius of the people, but if you get into the hospital then you know that nothing goes on but what it comes to the hospital sooner or later, and if there has been any damage, whatever it may be, it has to come to the hospital; if it is disease from over-feeding, or under-feeding, or if a man has been flogged, it has to come to the hospital.

We made our inspection that day of the dog-house; they had hundreds of dogs, because in winter the only way of travelling is by dog sleds. They have to keep them of course, hundreds of them, all summer.

I have seen the prisoners going in gangs from the prison to their work, and they seemed fairly well off—tolerably well clothed. Outside of the coal mines they may be seen resting themselves.

The mines are not like English coal mines, which have very deep pits, but are all surface mines.

In and about the church, on Sunday mornings, there are groups of the free. No prisoner is allowed to go there. The priests told me that they never had anything to do with the people in the prison; which is a great, sad defect. Here it is just as in any village church, and the place is quite full. Inside the church you find the Governor and the military, all on a par, all kneeling together, except that for the ladies there is perhaps a strip of carpet (you know there is much genuflection in the Greek service), and it is a most interesting sight. In the Greek church a great deal of the service is done by laymen. The layman in this case, a capital reader, was a murderer. The choir also, splendid singers, were murderers.

One thing was very pathetic: almost every woman, and some of the men, had on something or other which, you could see, had been brought all those thousands of miles—something which belonged to and reminded them of the place from which they came; it might be a little handkerchief, a kerchief, a little ribbon—but something peculiar, and one who knew the provinces of Russia could always tell where the wearer came from.

After I had seen them worshipping so earnestly, I could not help it; I was one of them and we were all worshipping together, and I have not the slightest doubt, that whether they were murderers or not, if strangers could see such a congregation, they would ask themselves, as I asked, is it not better, would it not be better, that all these convicts should be worshipping together, than that they should have been hanged?

There is no provision for education; that is voluntary. The Governor's wife takes charge of the matter and the school is supported partly at her expense and partly by contribution from others. But I have never heard of much money being spent.

The commonest punishment of the criminal is to shave half his head and chain him to a wheelbarrow. It is a long chain and gives him plenty of tether, but he has got to take his barrow with him, or he cannot go at all.

Flogging by the knout has been prohibited in Siberia. It is allowed only on this island of Sakhalin, and for murder. No Russian civilian is allowed to witness an execution of that sort; certainly no traveller. You can look over any book you like, even any romance you like, and I think you will find that no author ventures to say that he himself saw a case of flogging.

Although the Governor and I were so intimate, I noticed for the

first time one day a little constraint in him. I met the doctor, and said, "You do not look very well." "Well," he said, "I am very unhappy. There is a case which has come into court for flogging for murder, and I don't like it."

It was not a thing that I would like to see, but I thought that somebody who was competent should know what this flogging by the knout was, and however painful it might be to myself I had better see it for the purpose of truth. I saw very well that the Governor was keeping something from me. Here comes the advantage of being a doctor. The prison doctor went to the Governor and said that the prisoner's case was so critical, that he could not take the responsibility of deciding whether he was fitted for the punishment, at the examination which must take place four hours before, and he asked that I might come in consultation with him. The Governor could not refuse, and I did it. I afterwards went and saw the flogging. It took place in the great yard of the prison, in the presence of the Governor, the surgeon and myself. The criminal was stretched out on a table in the middle of the yard, and behind him stood the executioner. To the right of the table and at a good distance was the man who kept the tally, and counted aloud each blow as it fell: one, two, three, and so to the end.

I have never seen anything which was so painful to witness. The knout has a large thick handle, the strands of the whip are divided into three by knots, and with a hard end, and the scourge descends like a bird of prey, and picks out the piece.

The only pleasant thing about it is the end. As soon as it was over, and the man was not dead, he was taken to the hospital, and the doctor, who was one of the best of men, cared for him just as much as if he had been a sick woman in New York.

Punishment of this kind is unusual. The result of my observations in Siberia and Sakhalin is this: However bad the whole system may be, the Russians have a genius for mild administration. You will see that all through there is one idea, colonization, the utilization of criminals and political exiles for the highest good of the state. I think that this is a lesson that we might learn in our own prisons.

After we left Sakhalin, we had a most wonderful display of phosphorescence. About midnight we were struck by a typhoon, and such was the light, as the waters rushed in upon us, that every flake of foam was like the striking of a match, and the splendour was so great that you could see every face the whole length of the deck, and the whole outline of the ship. It was like being in the midst

of fire. It was so magnificent that we seemed to be in another world.

Our ship went to pieces and we were five hours in the water. At last we got to an island where we built a raft, and were picked up by a vessel bound for Japan.

On the way we encountered another typhoon, the one in which the Turkish man-of-war *Ertogrul* went down with some 600 men, who had just received special signs of favor from the Emperor of Japan.